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**A THEATER STRATEGY FOR NORTHEAST ASIA, ONE OF THE  
WORLD'S MOST CRITICAL REGIONS**

**COURSE 5 ESSAY**

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CLASS OF 95**

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## INTRODUCTION

Northeast Asia has long been and will remain one of the world's most important geopolitical regions, and events here directly impact US economic, political, and world order interests.<sup>1</sup> This region is unique because three of the world's four major powers (China, Japan, Russia) share common borders or close proximity. Geography, always important, is critical in the case of the Korean peninsula. Uniquely situated among the three major Asian powers, Korea's pivotal geopolitical position has caused three major wars in a short span of 56 years that involved the armed forces of all four major powers.<sup>2</sup> Korea's geographical position remains crucial in the region. A hostile and divided Korean peninsula or a reunified Korean nation does not alter significantly the geostrategic equation among the four major powers. In fact, a unified and stronger Korea over the long-term could still aggravate relations among the regional powers, particularly with Japan.

The US has vital interests in Northeast Asia that will be increasingly challenged or impinged upon by regional dynamics here. A forward looking theater strategy for the 21st century is essential to protect US national interests in this vital region. These US interests will be further defined in a separate section.

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<sup>1</sup> I have used Professor Nuechterlein's definition of national interests. See Don E. Nuechterlein, National Interests and Presidential Leadership: The Setting of Priorities (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1978).

<sup>2</sup> Disputes over the control of the peninsula resulted in the Sino-Japanese War 1894-95, the Russo-Japanese War 1904-05, and the Korean War 1950-53. Koreans view themselves as victims of a geographical squeeze and have historically characterized Korea as "a shrimp crushed between two whales."

This essay will offer an overarching US theater strategy for Northeast Asia. The strategy must convey a reinvigorated US commitment, which includes an active and modernized military presence. Concurrently, the US must be more dynamic in providing vision and effective leadership in its bilateral and new multilateral security relationships. This will be a difficult task because there is no clear threat and the US budget deficits, along with competing domestic problems, are redirecting a focus inward on America. Paradoxically, the US investment stake in a stable Northeast Asia can help ameliorate America's problems by providing markets that will stimulate US job growth.<sup>3</sup> Yet, in a very different and less tangible sense, the region could become destabilized politically and militarily, which would have wide ranging and negative consequences for the US national security and vital interests.

Organizationally, this essay will first describe US national interests in Northeast Asia. Second, the object of a theater strategy for Northeast Asia is described. Third, the regional context is described because it is crucial to developing a successful strategy and policy recommendations. The national security views of the Northeast Asian nations are briefly highlighted. Fourth, recommendations for a theater strategy is presented. The conclusion follows.

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<sup>3</sup> The world's highest sustained economic growth is occurring in Asia. States in Northeast Asia and elsewhere in the region have a growing middle class that will increasingly purchase modern consumer goods and services. Additionally, the US must position itself to "help finance and build some of the world's largest public works projects. Asia will need about \$1 trillion in dams and power stations, new telephone networks and highways over the next five years." The economic stakes are tremendous for the nations successful in capturing a significant portion of this market. David E. Sanger, *U.S. is Critical of Tokyo Plan to Rein in Yen: Asians Quietly Asked to Pressure Japanese*, The New York Times 16 Apr 1995: 1.

## UNITED STATES NATIONAL INTERESTS

The US has vital defense, economic, world order, and ideological interests in Northeast Asia. Regional stability is essential to safeguard them. It is often correctly stated that the overriding US national interest in the Pacific remains the preservation of a viable US-Japanese alliance. The US-Japanese Mutual Defense Treaty is an indispensable linchpin to regional stability. Yet, it is viewed too narrowly in the public realm in America and Japan. The importance of the treaty in the future lies less with the US defending Japan-proper than what the treaty contributes to stability in the Asia-Pacific region and particularly in Northeast Asia. Japan can safely maintain its "peace" constitution and does not feel compelled to rearm with a significant offensive capability. Suspicious neighboring states would not have to respond in an escalating arms race that would destabilize the region. In the national security realm, regional stability and US vital interests are well served by the mutual security relationship.

- **Economic:** Indisputably, the US has vital economic interests in Northeast Asia. This region is a principal center of world wealth. The US cannot allow itself to be excluded from these nations' markets. Free access will be essential to sustain continued US economic growth, which is fundamental to America's status and influence as a superpower. Thus, continued US influence is of paramount importance in this region.

- **Defense:** There is near unanimous agreement among national security experts on Asia that the US role in the region will remain vital.<sup>4</sup> US bilateral defense treaties with Japan and Korea are central to stability in the region. Looking ahead, the US will need to access to foreign "dual-use" high technology, particularly from Japan. For example, Japanese industry already leads in fabrication of single-piece composite aircraft wings (FS-X), flat-screen displays and certain aspects of anti-submarine warfare.<sup>5</sup> The list is longer and will grow. "High-technology warfare" underpins US warfighting strategy and doctrine. The US cannot afford to be excluded from technological breakthroughs.
- **World order:** The confluence of the world's four major powers in this geopolitical region make stability here vital to the maintenance of peace in the Asia-Pacific region and beyond. Many solid economists see this region as the upcoming economic center of the globe. Thus, stability here could be essential to maintenance of a peaceful international system. One thing is beyond dispute, Northeast Asian stability would be worse without a US presence that conveys a credible commitment.

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<sup>4</sup> *NE Asia Special Issue, Arms Control Today* (Nov. 1994) 3

<sup>5</sup> In 1991, I accompanied a Senate professional staff member on a visit to Mitsubishi Heavy Industries, Nagoya, Japan. Mitsubishi's aerospace division is co-producing the FS-X fighter with General Dynamics. GD representatives there eagerly anticipated getting the advanced composite manufacturing process from Mitsubishi as part of a technology exchange agreement.

## OBJECT OF THEATER MILITARY STRATEGY

A regional or theater strategy must integrate a military strategy with political and economic policies toward achieving specific national security objectives that preferably *spell out* what the US is attempting to do. Clarity is essential. Strategies can then be focused. Conversely, it is easy to discern if they are not. In an era of declining US defense dollars and a reduced American influence abroad, it is essential to be as specific as possible in identifying US interests. Once it has been determined what the US *is trying to do*, a national security can then be adjusted to more closely correlate to protecting or ensuring a favorable environment exists to achieve those objectives.

Since the end of the Cold War and the absence of a tangible threat to US national security, the US has been struggling to focus its foreign policy on an overarching concept. During the Cold War, US policy in Northeast Asia consisted primarily of containing the former Soviet Union (and earlier, China) and deterring a North Korean attack. Overriding US objectives have now shifted with the near total eclipse of Russian military power in the Far East Military District, and China's de facto repudiation of communism by an authoritarian regime, whose legitimacy is now based upon successfully managing a booming capitalist market economy.

A hostile North Korea is the remaining remnant of the Cold War here, but in October 1994 the US negotiated a breakthrough nuclear agreement that, if successfully implemented, could eventually ameliorate US-North Korean enmity.

Regardless, over the long-term North Korea as it exists today is an economic "has-been" from an earlier communist era, and its broken economy is already forcing change. Unfortunately, it is not known whether the change will be an explosion or an implosion. Its enormous conventional military forces near the DMZ remain one of the most destabilizing factors in all Northeast Asia.

Given the end of the bipolar standoff between the US and the former Soviet Union, and thus the absence of any need for a containment strategy in Northeast Asia, why is a US theater military strategy in this region important? The strategic importance of this region will continue to grow with the increasing economic ascendance of China, Japan, and South Korea, and with world-class growth eventually comes political and military clout. The region, however, is characterized by a strong sense of uncertainty about the future. Several issues immediately stand out:

- Due to the collapse of the bipolar framework, Northeast Asian powers now compete more directly;
- Record economic development has brought a desire for strategic depth to safeguard increasing prosperity;
- Regional powers fear a derailment of China's economic growth or a leadership struggle after Deng Xiaoping dies could endanger China's stability, which would negatively impact the region;
- Regional states must deal with a probable nuclear-armed North Korea with theater ballistic missiles (TBM) that can reach Japan, Korea, and



soon Alaska ;

- Most troubling, despite the Bush and Clinton administrations' assurances, Asian nations question the US resolve to stay militarily engaged in Asia for the long-term, which requires strategic adjustments on their part ;
- Even if the US remains engaged in Northeast Asia, can it lead the region when its military dominance is not matched by its economic superiority?<sup>6</sup>
- The net effect of the above raises serious questions about the future regional balance of power if the stabilizing US role is in question.<sup>7</sup>

Furthermore, all the regional states have been engaged in a qualitative arms buildup which has emphasized a power projection capability. Much is at stake in Northeast Asia, and the interaction between the US, Japan, and China can profoundly affect the security environment in this region. The US has profound national security concerns in Northeast Asia even with the end of the Cold War

## NORTHEAST ASIA REGIONAL CONTEXT

In Northeast Asia, there are six dyadic relationships among the four great powers (US-Japan, US-China, US-Russia, Japan-China, Japan-Russia, Russia-China). Importantly none of these relationships "has been consistently stable and friendly, and *all* have eventuated in combat at some point in this century. Today there is only one scene of contention where all the great powers' interests

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<sup>6</sup> Tong Whan Park, *Improving Military Security Relations. Korea and the World: Beyond the Cold War*, ed. Young Whan Kihl (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994) 218

<sup>7</sup> Excellent coverage of these issues can be found in *Strategic Assessment 1995: U.S. Security Challenges in Transition* (National Defense University: Institute for National Strategic Studies, 1995) 17

intersect—Korea”<sup>8</sup> The Korean peninsula must also be viewed in both a historic and regional context—beyond the North Korean threat to the South.

Developments on the Korean peninsula impact the national interests of all four major powers. Regional dynamics are complex and closely interrelated. Political, economic, and military developments on the Korean peninsula do not occur in isolation. This is why three wars have been fought for control of the Korean peninsula. Also important, historical memories by Koreans and Chinese of Japan’s exploitative colonization, as well as Japanese brutalities in World War II, remain strong.<sup>9</sup>

- **NORTH KOREA**—threatens the vital interests of all four powers with its development of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons and TBM’s. Its long-range *No-dong 2* missile will give it the capability to deliver nuclear weapons throughout all Northeast Asia.<sup>10</sup> North Korean weapons development could destabilize the region by prompting an increasingly qualitative arms race, which would arouse deep-seated insecurities among the Northeast Asian powers. Already Northeast Asian states have been importing high-technology weapons systems with power projection capabilities.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Richard K. Betts, *Wealth, Power, and Instability: East Asia and the United States After the Cold War*, *International Security* (Winter 1993/94) 46.

<sup>9</sup> China suffered ravages from multiple foreign powers from the mid-19th century through W W II, but the order of magnitude at the hands of the Japanese is key. The Japanese army is “blamed for the deaths of 20 million Chinese in the 1930’s and 40’s.” Nicholas D. Kristof, *Many in Japan Oppose Apology to Asians for War*, *The New York Times* 6 Mar. 1995: A9.

<sup>10</sup> William C. Martel and William T. Pendley, *Nuclear Coexistence: Rethinking U.S. Policy to Promote Stability in an Era of Proliferation* (Air War College, Air University, Maxwell Air Force Base, Studies in National Security No. 1, April 1994) 81.

<sup>11</sup> Michael T. Klare, *The Next Great Arms Race*, *Foreign Affairs* (Summer 1993) 151.

North Korea continues to make Northeast Asia what is often characterized as the "hottest spot" on the globe. During the last several years, when Washington realized Pyongyang was on the verge of developing a major strategic nuclear program, the US undertook tough negotiations with North Korea. Washington was not getting any results and resorted to UN-sponsored sanctions in the summer of 1994. North Korea unambiguously declared it would consider sanctions an act of war, and Pyongyang threatened to turn Seoul into a "sea of fire."

The US-North Korean nuclear crisis last summer was far more serious than Americans realize. Secretary of Defense Perry stated that last summer he was only days away from requesting that President Clinton approve the military buildup needed to fight the first days of a war.<sup>12</sup> Fortuitously, former President Carter responded to a third invitation from Pyongyang to intervene in the negotiations.<sup>13</sup> Carter went to Pyongyang and astonished all when he negotiated a temporary freeze on the North Korean nuclear program.<sup>14</sup> Unfortunately, the subsequent US-North Korean *agreed framework* is in danger of falling apart and the situation on the peninsula remains a powder keg.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Perry has stated that if the *agreed framework* falls apart, he will ask Congress for money to build up US forces in Korea. *Perry Ties Force Buildup to Korea Pact*, Boston Globe 10 Feb 1995. 7

<sup>13</sup> The article quotes a senior official as stating "he got what nobody else would have or probably could have gotten from them. They decided to talk, not shoot." Jim Wooten, *The Conciliator*, The New York Times Magazine 29 Jan. 1995. 33.

<sup>14</sup> A senior official stated the CIA was adamant that the North Koreans would never agree to such a deal with the US. Also, some State officials were initially furious when Carter publicly announced the deal because they believed he went beyond the official US policy guidelines given to him. Interview, 19 Dec 94.

<sup>15</sup> The US must be alert to one possible North Korean option in this regard, a nightmare scenario. If the *agreed framework* does unravel, it is conceivable that Pyongyang may logically conclude that the price of the status quo (economic, political, and military) will at some point exceed the cost of war. That is

● **SOUTH KOREA**--does not perceive the North Korean threat in the same way as the US. South Koreans believe North Korea will not attack as long as the US maintains a major "trip-wire" force in South Korea. Indicative of higher priorities, the South Korean military is pursuing arms modernization against other regional threats, especially Japan. For example, the South Korean navy is acquiring at least nine modern German Type 209 submarines,<sup>16</sup> a major investment that cannot be justified by a minimal North Korean maritime threat, which primarily consists of old Soviet coastal combatants (torpedo and SS-N-2 Styx missile craft) and obsolescent *Romeo* and *Whiskey* submarines.<sup>17</sup> Rather, Seoul's new submarines are for the future defense of South Korea's sea lines of communication (SLOC) to the south (and east)

Should Japan ever go nuclear in response to a North Korean threat, Seoul would feel a strong imperative to develop a nuclear weapon option because of overwhelming anti-Japanese feelings based on historical precedent. China too would respond fiercely to any Japanese development of nuclear weapons. Geopolitical pressures for nuclear proliferation are unusually strong in Northeast Asia. A North Korean nuclear capability would profoundly impact this region. It could well start a chain reaction that would undermine the entire NPT effort.

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survival issues could compel North Korea to attack the South in anticipation of political and economic gains from a toughly negotiated peace with South Korea, the US, and Japan

<sup>6</sup> Betts 101

<sup>7</sup> The Military Balance 1994-1995 179

<sup>8</sup> Betts 101

● **CHINA**—is the biggest unknown and a concern throughout the Asia-Pacific. It is now headed toward becoming the world's second largest economic power if it sustains its phenomenal growth, which it has for more than 10 years. China is now eager to change the status quo and its searing humiliation at the hands of the West in the last century remains poignant.

China will protect its national interests by increasingly asserting itself as the hegemonic power in the Asia-Pacific region. Beijing views this as its legitimate right. It is causing consternation among Southeast Asian nations because of its unequivocal claim to all the Spratly Islands against the claims of five other nations.<sup>19</sup> Beijing will view its hegemonic rights similarly in Northeast Asia. A confrontation some time in the future with a US 7th Fleet ship is inevitable and it will be at Beijing's choosing. These factors and a clear post-1949 record by China for resolving contentious issues by resorting to military force has made China's neighbors suspect and concerned for the future.

Additionally, China recently became for the first time a net importer of oil to fuel its burgeoning economy, and it will become a major world importer of food. Finally, China has given every indication that it intends to be the regional hegemonic power in the Asia-Pacific. All these factors do not bode well for a peaceful Northeast Asia, let alone a tranquil Asia-Pacific.

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<sup>19</sup> Vietnam, Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei, and Taiwan. Perhaps as a harbinger of more to come, China recently upset the status quo over the Spratlys by staking its claim to the Panganiban Reef in the chain, which is also claimed by the Philippines. China erected a military outpost on pylons, occupied by Chinese and patrolled by Chinese ships. This "contravenes the Manila Declaration of 1992" in which the claimants to the Spratlys agreed not to use military force. Frank Ching, *Manila Looks for a Slingshot*, Far Eastern Economic Review 9 Mar. 1995: 40.

North Korea's missile proliferation efforts have already begun to aggravate Chinese national security sensitivities. Under the threat of North Korean TBM proliferation, Tokyo has agreed to a US offer to participate in a theater ballistic missile defense program to protect the Japanese homeland against potential North Korean aggression. The Chinese Foreign Ministry recently publicly attacked this effort. The Chinese military fears such an anti-missile system, if deployed to South Korea or Japan, could undermine the credibility of China's relatively small nuclear deterrent force of about 300 long-range missile warheads<sup>20</sup>

A natural underlying tension exists between China and Japan. It largely stems from geopolitical proximity, historic military enmity and a mutual sense of cultural superiority. Chinese sensitivities will appear when Japan's economic might and inevitable international assertiveness compel Tokyo to reduce its dependence upon the American security and diplomatic mantle. This pressure will be amplified, if or when, US forces are reduced in Korea and Japan. Regardless, China will continue to modernize its military forces, which are aimed at a significant power projection capability.

- **JAPAN**—cares very much what happens on the Asian mainland because of its “geographical proximity and historical experience.”<sup>21</sup> Privately, Japan views a nuclear armed Korean peninsula as a critical threat to its vital interests,

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<sup>20</sup> Patrick E. Tyler, *China Warns Against Star Wars Shield for U.S. Forces in Asia*, The New York Times 18 Feb. 1994: 4.

<sup>21</sup> Henry Kissinger, Diplomacy (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994) 827.

largely because of the historical and cultural animosity between the nations<sup>22</sup>

"When, in 1992, then Japanese Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa was asked whether Japan would accept a North Korean nuclear capability, he answered with very un-Japanese directness by the single word 'no'."<sup>23</sup>

Loss of confidence in the US defense commitment would force Japan to react, which may include a nuclear option. As noted, China would react to any offensive rearming by the Japanese, especially a nuclear arms program<sup>24</sup>. The evolution of the Sino-Japanese relationship over the long-term may proceed peacefully, but it may not. No one knows.

- **RUSSIA**—alone among the four major powers cannot focus on vital or major issues in Northeast Asia in the short-term. The Russian leadership is overwhelmed struggling with internal problems such as economic restructuring, lack of a political consensus, and coping with rebellious republics and ethnic disputes on its southwestern border and in Central Asia.

Moscow does have vital defense, economic, and world order interests in its easternmost Maritime Province, but there is no immediate threat against this province. At the moment, Russian interests on the Pacific Rim have become nearly a peripheral concern. They will not always be so.

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<sup>22</sup> A senior US official said that in the course of negotiations with North Korea, "Japan proved to be the ideal ally. Japanese officials were supportive throughout the process. They were more sophisticated (than the South Koreans) and would have supported sanctions, contrary to The New York Times reporting. They were really on board with the US." Interview, 19 Dec. 1994.

<sup>23</sup> Henry Kissinger, Diplomacy (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994) 827.

<sup>24</sup> China can justifiably claim that "second-generation improvements to its relatively modest nuclear arsenal are essential if its deterrent against a first strike is to remain credible into the next century." *Stopping the Explosions: China Will Ban Nuclear Tests When Its Security is Assured*, ASIaweek 16 Nov. 1994. 23.

In the long-term, if Russia can resolve its major internal problems in the western half of its empire, Moscow will become increasingly concerned about stability in Northeast Asia. China and Japan both have territorial disputes with Russia in the East. A modernized Chinese and Japanese military, prompted in part by a chain reaction to insecurities caused by North Korea, would eventually capture Moscow's attention. A secure Vladivostok, the only major gate to the Pacific economic miracle, will always be a vital interest to Russia. Additionally, Moscow cannot avoid being concerned over China's eventual impact upon the balance of power on the Eurasian landmass.

● **PROLIFERATION OF WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION**—In the future, the pressures for proliferation of WMD in Northeast Asia will be ever present. The nature of such weapons offers expanded options, especially for smaller powers. For example, "If the nuclear agreement with North Korea falls through in the years ahead, Pyongyang could warn of possible nuclear missile attack on 'foreign bases' in Japan as a means of undermining Tokyo's readiness to support the defense of Korea."<sup>25</sup> If the US nuclear umbrella loses its credibility, South Korea and Japan would come under pressure to withdraw from the Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT) and develop nuclear weapons. Any possibility involving a potential nuclear confrontation would immediately impact the US and Japan and could quickly involve China and Russia. Therefore, North Korea must not be allowed to "restart" its nuclear weapons program. The ripple

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<sup>25</sup> Lewis A. Dunn, *Containing Nuclear Proliferation*, Adelphi Paper No. 263 (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, Winter 1991) 25.



effect would be powerful because nearby nations cannot afford to come under nuclear blackmail.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

This is both a difficult and opportune time to propose an overarching theater strategy for Northeast Asia. First, it is troublesome, and therefore challenging, for a number of reasons. There is the declining defense budgets in the out years. Varying estimates forecast a \$100 billion plus DoD shortfall between now and 2001. This cannot be largely offset by savings in base closures and reformed defense acquisition. The shortfalls are large and inevitable. It will be painful for the CINCs and services alike. It is unrealistic to assume the defense budget will go up again in the out-years. Asian ruling elites are well aware of this, which makes them skeptical about America's long-term military commitments. Despite US administration assurances, they are keying on the US Congress and see it reflecting a trend back toward traditional US isolationism. Their doubts are reinforced by a negative view of US economic foundations, and the decline of the dollar on the world markets has surely exacerbated this perception.

It is against this picture that the US must convey a renewed and credible commitment to remain fully engaged in Asia. On the other hand, this is an auspicious time because—North Korea notwithstanding—Northeast Asia is peaceful, and there is time to thoughtfully develop a long-term theater strategy

In proposing a theater strategy, realism must be the template. Grand schemes during a period of budgetary decline are non-starters. US intentions and capabilities must also accommodate emerging regional realities. Interaction between the US, Japan, and China can profoundly affect the security environment. China is key to long-term political and military stability and economic growth in this region. The US must take care not to appear to be colluding against China, while at the same time counter-balancing it. A theater strategy must also be broad enough to accommodate either the current hostile Korean division or a unified Korea. While North Korea deserves the utmost attention, a US long-term strategy for Northeast Asia must look beyond the North Korean threat. More destabilizing problems could develop between China, Japan, and Korea in the 21st century.

A Northeast Asia regional security dialogue among the four major powers and the two Koreas is a stated US goal.<sup>26</sup> As Washington did during the nuclear crisis last summer, it should engage North Korea in concert with the major regional powers, including South Korea. The national interests of the regional powers, more often than not, will overlap. The end of the Cold War will now allow an informal exchange on regional security issues. Some players will initially balk, but the US should encourage even observers to attend. It could help clarify viewpoints among the powers over developments on the Korean peninsula and elsewhere. Hopefully this would ameliorate friction and prevent

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<sup>26</sup> Secretary of Defense Perry has just released a useful regional security review that addresses US national interests in Asia. It specifically mentions such a Northeast Asia security dialogue. See [United States](#)

misunderstandings over issues before they become serious points of contention in the future

The US-Japan security alliance must be further strengthened. This alliance is crucial, although the reasons are not immediately obvious. As stated previously, the benefits it provides should be viewed from a geostrategic perspective. For example, reinforcing the Korean theater would be extraordinarily difficult without access to Japanese bases. There are no easy US solutions for strengthening what is indeed a critical alliance. The military relationship deserves closer attention and its potential to support an MRC in Korea can be much more thoroughly planned.<sup>27</sup> One of the most effective measures the US military can undertake is closer consultation with its Japanese counterparts. The fact that they have been consulted may lead the Japanese to acquiesce on many issues they may have resisted. Common understandings on mutual security issues is an essential goal

Several policies for a theater strategy provide effective opportunity costs:

▲ Current bilateral agreements can provide the institutional foundation for expansion into multilateral security mechanisms. A NATO-type organization is not feasible because the Asian nation-states have never had the historically close relations and other commonalities that NATO nations enjoy. Rather,

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Security Strategy for the East Asia-Pacific Region (DoD, Pentagon Office of International Security Affairs, Feb. 1995) 13-14

<sup>27</sup> US Forces Japan was criticized last year for being woefully unprepared to help support such a contingency. I have verified this since then in conversations with several PACOM senior officers. The fact is HQ USFJ is a "backwater."

multilateral activities with the US in lead will function as confidence-building measures and thus avoid common misunderstandings and misperceptions

▲ A concerted effort to build solid military-to-military contacts from the most senior US officers downward is one of the most effective and cost-free options available. It should start at the services so relationships are already established before generals become CINCs and hold key JCS leadership positions. The real target here of course is China. First, because it will be the strongest military in this region, and second, the most likely confrontations with US forces will likely come from China as it becomes the major hegemonic power in the region. Thus, military-to-military relations might not only head-off incidents because of increased understanding and institutional ties, equally important, it is one of the most cost effective methods for building understanding and trust.

▲ The US should pursue confidence-building measures that include making Asian nations' defense policies and strategic plans (intentions) more transparent—so the worst is not assumed in its absence. Peaceful cooperation will create a relatively secure region, whereas, competition and friction could have an unsettling effect throughout the Asia-Pacific region<sup>28</sup>

▲ A continued key goal must be nonproliferation of WMD. It is in every nation's interest. Cooperation must be encouraged. While China has helped the US in negotiating with North Korea, it can do more<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Ralph A. Cossa, *U.S. Foreign Policy In Asia: Churchill Was Right!*, Strategic Review Winter 1995-76 74-78

<sup>29</sup> Washington has asked Beijing to wield its influence with Pyongyang to "unblock" a dispute that threatens to scuttle the landmark US-North Korean nuclear weapons agreement. US officials now

▲ A striking perception gap exists among the military headquarters at US Forces Korea, CINCPAC, and Washington concerning the nature of the North Korean problem and the security situation in Northeast Asia in general. For example, last summer Washington was viewed in the Pacific as "hyping" the North Korean threat. Also, at the recommendation of the last CINC/US Forces Korea, the current Chairman of the JCS is considering establishing a Northeast Asia sub-regional command, which HQ PACOM strenuously opposes. As a result, an underlying animosity is evident among the staffs in handling strategy formulation and developing policy solutions. All three elements carry out US policy and wield heavy military clout. It is impossible to implement an effective theater strategy and coherent policies when such divisions exist. This problem can only be resolved by the CINCs. It requires attention.

## CONCLUSIONS

The geopolitical situation in Northeast Asia is in flux. The world's most dynamic and sustained economic growth is occurring here. A significant portion of this new wealth is being invested in high-technology military forces with a power projection capability. Historical animosities exist between all the powers in the region. Such resentments lie just beneath the surface and occasionally bubble to the top. Specific incidents could reawaken these ill feelings and consequent actions could destabilize the region.<sup>30</sup> One of the most significant

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consider the situation urgent. "US Requests China's Help With N Korea: Beijing Asked to Break Nuclear Pact Dispute." The Washington Post 14 Apr 1995: A25.

<sup>30</sup> South Korea is frustrating the US military leadership in Korea by ignoring important modernization requirements for its army to effectively defend against North Korean conventional forces (for example, counter-battery artillery radars). Instead, Seoul is preparing for a long-term threat and is investing

events of the late 20th century is the potential reemergence of China as a genuine world power. Unlike Tokyo, Beijing has no inhibition in regaining its proper position. Yet, this critical region, long characterized by conflict, has no multilateral security mechanisms that serve as a restraint like NATO and the Warsaw Pact. Rapidly changing national dynamics present endless regional scenarios. Sophisticated Asia watchers readily admit they cannot predict the end results in this critical region. Is anything certain or tangible in Northeast Asia?

The US relationship with Japan, "the most important bilateral relationship in the world--bar none" continues to be discussed almost solely and negatively in terms of open markets problems. Much more is at stake over the long-run in terms of stability and security in the region, all of which are extremely important to US vital interests.

Concurrently, it is time to reexamine American national interests against this region's geopolitical dynamics with a fresh look and a long view. Stability in Northeast Asia is critical to US national interests. Historically, US policy toward this region has been piecemeal and reactive. Crisis management has reigned. For example, Eberstadt notes, "Nearly all of the great events that have defined Korea since the peninsula's partition have caught policy-makers unprepared."<sup>31</sup>

US vital interests in Northeast Asia will increase in importance because of the shift in world economic power to this region. The US has a momentous

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millions in a power projection capability. Despite Seoul's denial. German Type 209 submarines are a hedge against Japanese intervention of its SLOCs

<sup>31</sup> Eberstadt 151

stake in stability in this geopolitically key region of the world and it must continue to play a pivotal role. The history of conflict in this region is not reassuring.

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